Interview with Ralph Earle II

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

DIRECTOR RALPH EARLE, II

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: February 1, 1991

Q: I wonder if you could give me a little about your background, kind of where did you come from?

EARLE: I'm a Philadelphia lawyer. I went to Harvard College, and spent a couple of years in the Army during the Korean War, and then went back to Harvard Law School. Clerked for a federal judge. Went to a Philadelphia law firm. Stayed there almost fifteen years. It was the largest law firm in Philadelphia. Came down here the last year of the Johnson administration to be principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs in the Pentagon. Paul Warnke was the assistant secretary. I stayed on as acting assistant secretary after the Nixon administration came in, in January of '69, and was offered a job by Mel Laird as his man at NATO, the defense advisor to the US mission to NATO.

I'm telling you more than where I came from, I'm giving you a summary of the whole thing.

Q: Oh, yes, this is good, we'll get the summary.

EARLE: I spent three and a half years at NATO as the defense advisor, which was the number three person in the mission. I then returned to the private practice of law in

Philadelphia, but was asked by Paul Nitze to be a consultant to the SALT II delegation, and made several trips to Geneva during that year. And in the summer of 1973 was offered the job, on Paul Nitze's recommendation, by Fred Ikl#, the director of the Arms Control Agency, to be the ACDA (Arms Control and Disarmament Agency) representative on the SALT II delegation, where I served from October of 1973 until March of 1977. When the Carter administration came in, I became the alternate chief of the delegation to Paul Warnke. And when he resigned in '78, I became the chief of the delegation, and remained the chief of the delegation through the Summit of June 1979, when the SALT II treaty was signed. And on the third of January, 1980, became the director of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, in which capacity I served until the day before Mr. Reagan was inaugurated. And since then, I've been active in arms control organizations, and now I'm the chairman of something called the Lawyers' Alliance for World Security, which used to be the Lawyers' Alliance for Nuclear Arms Control, and have spoken and written over the last ten years on the subject.

Q: First, you went to ISA; that was your first real government position. This has been described as the Pentagon's Department of State. And I must say, I one time inspected over there and did some efficiency reports, and I was absolutely astounded to see the replication of desk officers and all over in the Pentagon. What was your impression of ISA, in the foreign affairs context?

EARLE: Well, I have to give a personal impression first. I really had no idea what I was getting into when I was offered the job. I thought I was going to be some sort of special assistant to Paul Warnke, who was a lawyer. And it turned out I was his alter ego. I was the principal deputy assistant secretary, and there were seven other deputy assistant secretaries. There were four that we called regional, which really mirror-imaged the State Department. Europe and NATO was one. Far East, I think we called it...I forget what we called it.

Q: East Asia or something?

EARLE: Yes, NEA was Near East and Asia. We called it NESA, Near East and South Asia. The State Department, I think, called it NEA. And we had the Far East. And we combined Africa and South America into one. That's why there were four instead of the five regions that exist in the State Department. And then we had three functional deputies. One, Policy Planning, which was then Mort Halperin. He was the youngest deputy in the Pentagon; he was twenty-nine years old when he had that job. And we had one for Military Assistance. That was run by a three-star general or admiral. And we had one...I'm trying to think of the euphemism for arms sales that we had. International Logistics Negotiations, is what we called it, and that was the arms sales department. Se we had seven deputies doing it.

What was its role? I think it was the best job I've ever had.

Q: This was from when to when, by the way?

EARLE: I was only there about a year, from April '68 until June '69. I like to sleep late—I couldn't wait to get up in the morning to go to that job. There was absolutely nothing that was on the front page of the newspaper involving foreign affairs that didn't involve us one way or the other.

The disheartening thing was, of course, that we had a significant responsibility for the Vietnam War. Fortunately for me, Paul Warnke, who was the assistant secretary, took almost full responsibility for that aspect, and he took almost full responsibility for NATO and most of Western Europe, and he left the rest of the world, if you will, to me.

Just as a sort of administrative comment, he and I were the only ones who could sign-off papers to the Secretary. All the other deputies' papers had to come up through us, so that my In-box always had memoranda to the secretary, involving, as I say, practically everything in the world except Vietnam and NATO.

Q: Clifford was the...?

EARLE: Clifford had just come in as secretary of defense. McNamara had left in December. I'd been originally offered the job by Nitze and McNamara, and by Warnke, of course, but by the time I got there, McNamara had departed and Clifford had come in.

Q: How would you describe Warnke's style? How did he run things?

EARLE: Well, Paul is one of the most brilliant men I know, and also one of the most articulate men, and he's a very close friend of mine. He ran it, I thought, immensely effectively. He delegated well. As I said, I was somewhat disconcerted when I arrived, thinking I was going to be something like his special assistant, and discovered that I was going to be his alter ego. He delegated to me, and to the other deputies, a tremendous amount of responsibility. His mind is so good and he's such a quick study that it took him virtually microseconds to determine what was going on, if he wanted to know.

We had a deputies' lunch once a week. We had a staff meeting once a week, which was largely show and tell. The staff meetings were fairly large, thirty or forty people. But Paul was also immensely humorous; we had fun at the staff meetings. The deputies' lunch was a little more serious, just the nine people. The military assistants didn't come to those. Those lunches were important, I think, for Paul to be kept abreast. He would ask a number of piercing questions and make some suggestions. And I think I learned a lot from him, in terms of running an organization. It was sort of a very loose control, but clearly he was in charge. There was no question who the boss in that organization was. But I would say, among the deputies and indeed among everybody else on the staff, he was immensely popular, and deservedly so because of his personality and the way he dealt with people.

Q: How did you see ISA and the State Department? I mean, did they bump into each other? How did it work?

EARLE: Yes. It's interesting that you are pushing your fists together when you ask me this question, because that's a somewhat accurate reflection of how we did work. We obviously came at issues with different responsibilities. And the counterparts—obviously a considerable amount of the relationship was dependent on personal relationships.

Did Fred Wyle get along with John Leddy? Well, I think they respected each other, but they fought all the time. Did Dick Stedman get along with Bill Bundy? Yes, I think they did. I think that was a much more relaxed...even though they were dealing with the very controversial and highly energized issue of Vietnam. Warnke, I think, got along well with Nick Katzenbach, who was the Under Secretary of state at the time, and the other assistant secretaries, clearly with Bill Bundy, whom he saw a lot. There was kind of a secret meeting...I forget what it was called...every week, maybe every day, about Vietnam.

But there was clear tension. We sort of were the lawyers or representatives with the State Department, not only for OSD, the Office of Secretary of Defense, but we were also the representatives for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Looking at the map of Africa on your wall, I'm just reminded of a time that the Air Force wanted to get some airplanes—it was before Diego Garcia became a base, but somewhere on the East Coast of Africa. To do it promptly and efficiently, it required overflights of about five different countries. It could have been done differently, by flying around Africa; the Air Force obviously wanted overflight rights. The State Department really didn't want to use up its currency with those five countries and ask them for overflight rights. These weren't combat aircraft, if I remember, they were transport, but still they were US Air Force.

That was a typical...not a major issue, but one where the two sides came at it from quite different interests. Our interest was to get the planes to the East Coast of Africa; the State Department's interest was to maintain their credit and credibility and relations with the four or five African countries that would be overflown.

Again, I remember the Navy wanted to refuel some ships transiting the Cape of Good Hope. And at that time there was the usual...there was a controversy about apartheid in South Africa and couldn't the Navy do it somewhere else. Well, if they did it somewhere else, it would be much more expensive, it would require more sea days, etc., etc., etc.

That's the typical kind of conflict, if you will. I mean, we worked them out. That was our job, to work them out.

Q: Do you think there was sort of a learning process about the problems of both sides? Or was it just going in and fighting it out until one side or the other sort of fell, exhausted?

EARLE: I think it's a combination. Of course, coming at it from the side I came at it from, I thought that, you know, we knew better and the State Department appeared to be sluggish and overly conservative and so forth. I'm sure that they had comparable reactions toward us.

I think one thing that was very frustrating for the people in State was that we were much smaller and therefore we were much quicker. And Paul and I (if Paul was there, he; if he wasn't, I) had absolute, complete access to the secretary and the deputy secretary. Anytime we wanted, if he wasn't tied up, we could get in to see Clark Clifford or Paul Nitze.

Now that obviously was not the case in the State Department. The assistant secretaries could not get in to see Dean Rusk or, in the few months that I was there in the Nixon administration, Bill Rogers. And I understood why. I mean, the State Department's a much bigger organization. There are far more ceremonial obligations on the secretary of state. And I think it frustrated them...it certainly would have frustrated me if I had been in the State Department.

Whereas we'd have a dispute, and then an hour later I could call whomever I was dealing with and say, “Oh, I just talked to the secretary of defense and he wants it done this way.” And that's pretty tough on the guy on the other end of the phone.

And so I would say, perhaps immodestly, we won more than we lost. But that was the main bureaucratic reason we did.

Q: Obviously, the Vietnam thing was an all encompassing problem, but how did you view NATO at the time? You were dealing with NATO, I assume. Did you see this as a relatively weak shield? Was this more a political than a military thing and hope for the best?

EARLE: Well, bear in mind that I then spent four years at NATO, so my answer to your question is obviously going to be colored by both my...I mean, I can't separate the two jobs completely. As the number two in ISA in the Pentagon and then for almost four years as the senior civilian representative of the secretary of defense at NATO, I saw it, obviously, primarily as a military alliance. My job, certainly when I was over there, was to beef up the alliance.

I ran something called AD-70, which was a Mel Laird creation, Alliance Defense for the 1970s, which was to try to rationalize the supplies and the equipment and the ammunition and the weapons and also the supply systems and so forth. We were always trying to improve NATO readiness. And so I can say, quite easily, that I saw it primarily as a military alliance and less as a political alliance.

Now when I was there, it was apparent that it was highly political: That the ambassadors, the “perm reps”, were diplomats, they were not soldiers; and that the Military Committee was not considered very significant. (Nor was it.) That the real military clout was out at Mons, the SHAPE headquarters and SACEUR. Lemnitzer was there when I was in the Pentagon, and then Andy Goodpaster was there when I was at NATO.

So, to answer your question, I certainly saw it as a military alliance. Now, if you interview Paul Warnke, I think he was probably more politically sensitive to it than I. I was a real newcomer here in Washington.

Q: I was going to say, you were playing with the big boys right away, weren't you.

EARLE: Yes, it was, it was...

Q: Again, when one is trying to recapture the time, how did you feel about the Vietnam War when you first got there? This was the beginning of the Johnson...

EARLE: It was the height of the war. Actually, I was sworn in April Fool's Day (naturally) 1968, which was twelve hours after Lyndon Johnson had said that he wasn't going to run again. So there was a dramatic change. But the war didn't stop.

Let me back up. Before I came down to Washington, I was an interested newspaper reader. My father had been a political appointee twice in the Foreign Service, to Austria and Bulgaria, and he'd been governor of Pennsylvania, so I was perhaps more politically sensitive than many. But at the same time, I didn't know anything that anybody who read the New York Times didn't know.I supported the war, because I was always convinced that “they” (the people in Washington) knew something I didn't know. And I must say, I've always respected the military—I had two years in the Army myself—they must know what they're doing. And when I got to the Pentagon, within... well, it probably took a couple of months, I realized that they didn't know anything I didn't know. And this was a bummer. I mean, I had a distinct change of attitude.

Bear in mind, of course, that Paul Warnke was doing everything he could to bring it to an end. And he, along with a couple of others, Phil Goulding and others, and Nitze, for somewhat different motivation, turned Clifford around. That story, of course, is well known.

So I was clearly influenced by the Warnke attitude, and Dick Stedman, who was his deputy for the Far East, and Mort Halperin, and Les Gelb and so forth.

So I came as a not overly strong supporter, but as a supporter, of the war, and within months came to believe that it wasn't such a good idea after all.

Q: One other thing before we leave there. I think one of the disturbing things...and right now we're talking, this is the first of February and we're in a major war with Iraq... over arms assistance, or whatever you want to call it. In other words, the United States as well as other powers have been loading up all sorts of smaller powers with all sorts of sophisticated weapons. And, I mean, this was relatively early in the game, but, coming at it from the Pentagon point of view, and it was in your bailiwick, what was the feeling there about giving arms to Israel, to Latin America, anywhere?

EARLE: Well, as I said, at the outset, we had two whole divisions of ISA: one to give them away, and one to sell them. But we were beginning to phase-down the military assistance at that time.

Q: That was the giving away.

EARLE: Yes. But it was still healthy. In 1968 dollars, it was, I think, about four hundred or four hundred and fifty million. Which today sounds like nothing, but twenty-three years ago, four hundred million was fairly significant. The number of recipients had been reduced. Turkey, I think, was the only NATO country that was still getting it free. Maybe Greece was getting a little bit. And that was pretty much the program. We were supporting our allies; that was sort of the given. So the military assistance did not bother me, and I don't it think it bothered anybody.

The sales were a little different. There was a conflict. There was a lot of pressure that carried over from Secretary McNamara on balance of payments. We had annual missions to Germany for the so-called offset talks, to try and get them to send as much money

into the United States as we were spending over there. McNamara apparently was really hipped on this business of balance of payments, which of course in those days... The amounts then are just a trickle compared to what they are now.

I think we had a fairly sensible view, in ISA, toward arms sales. We did not like to sell to countries which we didn't think could afford it. We did not like to sell to countries which we didn't think needed it. But there was a considerable difference between ISA and the uniformed military. And you've got to understand that, to the extent that there was conflict between ISA and the State Department, there was an equal amount of conflict between ISA and the Joint Staff and the Joint Chiefs. We were sort of in the middle on a lot of these issues.

I can remember one particularly, where a major Latin American country wanted to buy three or four brand new destroyers. We thought that was pointless. I met with the then-chief of naval operations to discuss it, and he made one argument which I didn't find particularly compelling, and he made another argument which I did find particularly compelling. The noncompelling argument was: it would give us so much better relations with their navy, and if ever there is a war they can help us in our antisubmarine warfare. Well, that didn't sell me. But then, when he told me that if they didn't buy them from us that they were certainly going to buy them from the French; that was a pretty compelling argument. And that argument was made pretty persistently and consistently and effectively.

Q: And I suppose another argument would be that if we do this, this means there's a reduction in unit cost, isn't it?

EARLE: Not so much with destroyers. In this particular case, no. That's not an assembly line, so they're each a separate unit, although there is some reduction. Yes, on aircraft, that argument was made frequently about reducing unit cost to build a line and so forth.

Q: After this year, a new administration came in. It was the Nixon administration replacing the Johnson administration. And you sort of came in with...would you consider Democratic credentials?

EARLE: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. My father was a liberal governor of Pennsylvania.

Q: I was going to say, so how did you fit in with this?

EARLE: How did I come to stay? Mel Laird...I'm pretty sure my statistics are right...just a little anecdote. You may remember that Nixon had sort of a television spectacular and announced his entire cabinet in one fell swoop.

Q: I remember that, yes.

EARLE: And the next morning, my senior partner in my law firm in Philadelphia called me and said, “When will you be back?”

And I said, “I don't know.” I was having a lot of fun, I liked it. And Warnke was going to resign and they hadn't picked anybody to succeed him.

And my senior partner, who had been very active in the Republican party, said, “Well, I know Mel Laird, and he's the most Republican Republican I know, and the moment he gets in that building, you're gone.”

So I said, “Well, then I'll be back on the twenty-first of January.”

Well, I think Mel Laird kept more Democratic appointees in the Defense Department than all the rest of Nixon's cabinet did in all their departments. Dan Henkin stayed on as Public Affairs. The guy who is now Under Secretary of state for administration, Ivan Selin, stayed on as Systems Analysis. And Warnke left, and I was acting. And as acting ISA you do

see the Secretary literally for hours a day, and travel with him and so forth. So Laird got to know me, and I guess he liked me. And I heard later that the chiefs thought I was all right.

I had told him about the job in Brussels that had to be filled. Tim Stanley was coming home... I had told him the criteria that I thought he ought to look for in the person. Tim is a good friend of mine, but I think he had become a little more oriented to the mission than to the Pentagon. He'd been over there three or four years with Harlan Cleveland. And I said I thought whomever Laird sent there should be Laird's guy at NATO rather than NATO's guy at the Pentagon.

And one day, out of the blue, he asked me if I wanted to have that job. I said I was somewhat astonished. And he said, “Well, you're a little too Democratic to keep in Washington.”

And I said, “Well, fine, I'll take it, but only if we do it on the conditions that I've talked about: come home every three months and spend a week at the Pentagon.”

And he said, “Those are the only conditions under which you get the job.”

So it was, I think, a personal thing on Laird's part. He did get some flak from the Republican delegation from Pennsylvania that he was appointing me, and he asked me to do what I could to reduce it.

Q: Well, how does one go about reducing something like this?

EARLE: Well, first of all, the senators thought my appointment had to be confirmed by the Senate. So once they were told that that wasn't the case, they backed off. Hugh Scott I knew personally, and he was helpful. My particular congressman raised hell about it. But I had some Republican friends who were large contributors to him in Pennsylvania, and they just called him and told him to shut up. And he did.

Q: So that's how it worked. What was the job you went to in Brussels, and what was the responsibility? You went there in '69 and you stayed until '72.

EARLE: Right, I went the end of June '69 and came home in November of '72. The defense advisor was an outgrowth of a job that had been, when NATO was in Paris, called DEFREPNAMA. Now what did that stand for? Defense representative, I don't know... NATO, something. It had begun as kind of a hardware job (I think; this was years before), making sure that the NATO countries got their hardware from the US, and it became more of a political job.

When I arrived, they had just moved from Paris two years before. The US mission to NATO was about ninety people, of whom sixty worked for the defense advisor and the others were Foreign Service people. The defense advisor had been a civilian, Tim Stanley, as I mentioned. The deputy defense advisor was a two-star general. And we had people dealing with infrastructure; we had people dealing with defense planning; we had people dealing with communications— the spectrum of NATO, if you will, military activities. The chiefs of most of my divisions were colonels and captains, although the infrastructure guy, who I think is still there, was a civilian.

NATO, like any multilateral organization, is composed of committees and subcommittees. NATO was then fifteen countries, but, as somebody said quite accurately, “We're all equal, but one is considerably more equal than the others.” So we really played a very significant role in all of these committees, and of course we were the biggest contributor in terms of troops and dollars.

I inherited a very good group. Not quite as good a group as in ISA, which was also half civilian, half military. I mean, the people who worked in ISA have gone on to other things. Brent Scowcroft worked for us; he was an Air Force colonel at the time. And George Seignious, who became the director of the joint staff, was there, etc.,etc.

Q: It's sort of an honor roll of the defense establishment.

EARLE: Yes, ISA, really, the services sent their best people there. Because it was hot in those days.

Anyway, the people at NATO were awfully good. They weren't quite as good on the whole as the people at ISA, but there were some comers there, too.

Q: To understand this, the issues now... There were people sitting there saying that if a Soviet attack comes, we'll go at their left flank or their right flank—that was the military command.

EARLE: That's right. Well, really, out at SHAPE. Because, as I say, the military committee theoretically is the senior military body, and the chairman of the military committee is, in terms of protocol, the senior military figure in the alliance. But the guy who really counts is SACEUR, even though theoretically he works for the military committee.

Q: But your responsibilities were to give the proper support sort of on the supply-political side?

EARLE: It's a good question and difficult to answer. The military were the planners and the commanders, the tactical planners. The job that I had, it seemed to me, was to get these Europeans up to snuff in terms of their contribution to the military, whether it was through infrastructure, communications. We had something called NADGE, the NATO Air Defense Ground Environment System, which we were spending millions of dollars on, and the United States was paying more than the others. Well, that was natural, but we wanted cooperation and we wanted bigger funding. We just kept hammering all the time.

But when you would come to...well, take infrastructure again, which was a subject that I never fully comprehended; it was very complicated, with many formulae that are used. But our guy, Joe Loveland, who sort of invented infrastructure at NATO and, as I say, I think is

still there after thirty-five years or so, he would go to meetings and he would try to devise schemes that would reduce the US contribution and would get bigger contributions from the others, or allocations. And of course where the money was going to be spent was also a factor.

Just recently, when they planned to move the 16th Air Force from Spain to Italy, NATO infrastructure for the first time was going to build a base solely for American aircraft. After twenty years of dealing with this, I was amazed that we'd had that success.

Regarding defense planning, we did a lot of work for the Nuclear Planning Group, which met twice a year and which, as you may know, had begun as sort of a McNamara nuclear educational program. He began it to educate his fellow ministers of defense about nuclear weapons and their use and so forth. They met twice a year: once a year in Brussels, and once a year at some other place, always exotic and usually pleasant. NPG became known as the “NATO Pleasure Group”, because we went up the Rhine, to Hampton Court for dinner, and that sort of thing. But it was a very serious business, and we in Brussels spent a lot of time backing that up for Laird, those meetings. Of course, he had his own staff in Washington doing it, too.

I didn't go to many meetings. I was a delegator. I couldn't stand multilateral meetings—and I still can't. And fortunately I had enough good guys, that I'd send A to this meeting and B to that meeting. Then, as I'm sure you know, France had withdrawn from the military planning, so that the ambassadors, the permanent representatives, met formally twice a week: once as the North Atlantic Council, with France present; and once as the Defense Planning Group, with France absent. Whereas George Vest, the DCM, would back up Bob Ellsworth (the US perm rep) at the NAC, I, and sometimes George, would back him up at the Defense Planning Group.George and I worked very well together. We became good friends. He fully understood, again, sort of the transportation of this Defense-State conflict, if you will, that existed between ISA and State. He knew it could happen.

Larry Eagleburger came over. I'd never met him, I'd never heard of him, he'd been working for Henry Kissinger. The allegation was that he'd had a nervous breakdown. Actually, I think he'd had a tiny stroke and he was exhausted. And so they gave him the job as a political advisor at NATO. He came up to my office, and he introduced himself, and he said, “I'm told that you and I are not to like each other. As far as I'm concerned, that's bullshit. What do you think?”

And I said, “Me, too.”

And we were friends from that moment on. He never tried to get into my business unless I asked him to, which was frequently. And I never tried to get into his business unless that was true, too. We worked together very, very well.

Poor Ray Garthoff was POL-MIL, and there was really no need for a POL-MIL when you had a defense advisor and a political advisor. Ray is a very good friend of mine, but he kind of annoyed both Eagleburger and me, because he didn't have really a charter. Then, fortunately for Ray, and fortunately for Larry and me, the SALT talks got started and Ray really became very involved in the planning at the NATO level and then left to be the executive secretary of the SALT delegation.

Now I had another role, which bothered, I think, Bob Ellsworth somewhat. Spain, of course, was not in the alliance. And Laird wanted me to keep the Spanish apprized of what was going on at NATO, because obviously in the long term, once Franco departed the scene...

Q: And we did have bases in...

EARLE: Oh, yes, we sure did.

Q: I mean, major bases, naval and air.

EARLE: Actually, before I ever went to NATO, when I'd been in ISA, I had been the chief negotiator for the renewal of the base agreement with the Spanish. I had been over to Madrid a couple of times, and they knew me and I knew them, so that it was a natural when I went to NATO that Laird would pick me to go down to Spain, rather than send somebody over from Washington. And I'd go down to Spain after every major NATO meeting and brief the high general staff on what had happened, and go and kick tires at Torrejon Air Force Base and so forth.

And I think it bothered Bob Ellsworth because I was not his guy when I went on these trips, because, of course, he didn't have anything to do with Spain. But I'd always brief Bob, and I think he finally came to the conclusion that I wasn't doing anything behind his back that I wasn't telling him about.

So I did have that, I forget, what did they call me? the senior civilian representative of the secretary of defense in Europe. That took about five percent of my time.

Q: Well, I wonder if you could give a little idea of how you observed things. At that time, how did you observe the Soviet threat?

EARLE: Major. When I arrived, I inherited as a deputy the senior major general in the United States Army, who had been Audie Murphy's battalion commander when Audie Murphy won all his medals, Gene Salet. He was a nice guy, but he talked about the Fulda Gap so often that...

Q: Fulda Gap being, I suppose, the place where the Soviets...

EARLE: Where the Soviet armor would come through and break...

Q: Near Frankfurt, in that area.

EARLE: Right, and break into Western Europe. And I heard the Fulda Gap, the Fulda Gap.

They were clearly seen as a threat, and I think they were a threat. I mean, Stalin was long gone, but Brezhnev at that time was an aggressive, younger Brezhnev. And of course we'd had the Czechoslovakian thing in the summer of '68.

I remember sitting in the command center in the Pentagon at three in the morning with Paul Nitze when that happened, because Warnke and Clifford were on vacation.

So the fact that they'd been able to invade Czechoslovakia, and they'd laid down so much chaff that we didn't even know they were doing it. We knew something was happening, but radar saw nothing... Yes, they were perceived, and I think accurately perceived, as a significant threat.

And, of course, the East German forces were considered highly reliable. Whether they really were, in retrospect, is a question.

So that we were concerned that... Now I was never one that thought the Soviets could get to the Channel in three days. I thought that was absolute baloney. At the same time, I didn't think we could nail them on the Czech border and keep them there indefinitely.

I subsequently had a briefing when I was at ACDA from General Don Starrey, who I think has one of the most impressive minds I've ever encountered. This was years later, but he was of the same conclusion, that somewhere in between lay the truth. You didn't want Western Germany blown up, and you didn't want to go to tactical nuclear weapons, which at that time I think was considered more than a theoretical possibility.

Q: I can recall atomic artillery rolling through the streets of Frankfurt. This was '55 to '58, when I was a young vice consul. I kind of wondered about it.

EARLE: And we had those atomic demolition mines on the Greek-Bulgarian border. I made a couple of trips around the Med with Dave Packard, who was the deputy secretary of defense, and going to QRA bases where the F-4s were sitting with the bombs on them,

and the pilots in their flight suits practically in the cockpit ready to go. And there was no question that it was a real possibility.

Q: How did you see—walk through a little of these things— Germany fitting into this?

EARLE: Well, I remember before I went, Gardiner Tucker, who was the assistant secretary for systems analysis, said to me, “Ralph, when you go over there, you're going to think that you're the closest to the Brits because you speak the same language, but I think you're going to find attitudes are going to be more like the Germans, or the Germans are going to be more like you.”

There's a certain amount of truth to that. One, they worked as hard as we did. NATO is a single building with a lot of wings to it, and the German mission was very close to ours. In the short Brussels days it gets dark early, and the lights that kept burning were the German and the American lights. The other lights seemed to go out a lot earlier than ours did.

I found the ones at NATO very high class. I mean, I think most European NATO members send their best diplomats to the United States and to NATO. I don't know whether it's true or not, I would say that the U.N. comes in sort of third, or at least it did at that time. And so the caliber of all the delegations was very high. The British delegation was composed of people who have gone on to bigger and better things, and the German delegation was the same.

We certainly saw them as partners, as allies. We realized, at least I realized, that NATO performed a very important function and it wasn't just to keep the Soviets out of Western Europe.

In fact, Admiral Zimmermann, who was the inspector general (which was the euphemism for the chief of the German general staff), said to me at one NPG meeting that NATO

existed for two purposes: to keep the Soviets out of Western Europe, and to keep the Germans out of Western Europe. He thought that was a very good idea.

So there was always that consideration, that they were very good at making war, and efficient, but I never had the slightest problem about dealing with them as an ally.

Q: How about with the British?

EARLE: The British were also, I thought, fine. Again, bear in mind that this is a limited group of people you're talking to. They're at NATO and they are there to support NATO because that's the government policy. And so I'm not talking about the British foreign service as a whole. But, I mean, John Thomson was their DCM. He was later ambassador to the U.N. for them. And Michael Quinlan, whom I just saw in London last fall, is the state secretary for defense, was my counterpart. Good people. We were just talking about it at lunch today.

The Dutch defense guy, my counterpart, went into politics and became minister of defense and is now secretary general of WEU, Win van Eeklan.

Well, you asked me about the Germans, but the most cooperative were the British, the Germans, the Dutch...the Italians, pretty much.

Q: The Italians basically have always been there, haven't they?

EARLE: Yes, right.

Q: They're off to one side, but when you need them, they're available.

EARLE: That's right. Right, right. And they had good people, too.

The pains were the Danes.

Q: I was going to ask about the Danes and the Norwegians.

EARLE: From just the sheer defense point of view, the Norwegians were better than the Danes. The Danes were always looking for ways to get out of commitments, I thought. That was my impression. And the people they sent weren't as impressive. I saw a considerable distinction between the two.

It was nice having fifteen constituent countries to travel to. And since I was with the Defense Department, I always had a little jet available if I wanted to go places. And I did want to go places. And so I made a couple of trips to Norway and to Denmark, and the attitudes were quite different.

Of course, the Danish military qua military were fine, but they felt very constrained, and indeed were, by what you might call the almost pacifist attitude of their government.

But that wasn't true in Norway. At least that's not the impression I got. That they really believed in collective defense. One winter when I went up to the Finnmark, the northern part of Norway, looking across at the Soviets, I was accompanied not just by military people. Well, my military host was a brigadier general named Zeiner Gunderson, who later became chairman of the military committee.

But I just detected quite a different attitude toward the threat and the possibility of war and the willingness to fight it, in Norway than in Denmark. That may be unfair, because I didn't spend a lot of time...

Q: Let me ask you about the Greeks and the Turks. I might say, at that time, I was consul general in Athens. Obviously, the Greeks were looking at only one place, and that was Turkey. And it appeared that NATO was the convenient organization to get more equipment.

EARLE: Yes, I don't remember, while I was there, that there was a major Greek-Turk crisis.

Q: I don't think there was.

EARLE: There were two big blows that hit NATO while I was there. One was Qadhafi's seizure of the Libyan government and the termination of our rights. We had a bombing range down there, Wheelus Air Force Base. And the other was the election of Dom Mintoff as the prime minister of Malta, which really was perceived as, and actually I guess really was, a considerable blow to the Mediterranean defenses, because the Brits had to leave, and they had an extensive base in Malta. But I don't remember the Greeks and the Turks causing us a lot of problems.

Q: I don't think so, at that time. The Turks never really are that interested. It's only if Cyprus gets hot. The Greek colonels were consolidating their power, so they weren't poking the Turkish tiger at that particular point.

EARLE: That's right. I remember going with Mel Laird on a trip to Greece and dealing with the colonels—in person. Henry Tasca was the ambassador at that time. Was that when you were there?

Q: That was when I was there, yes.

EARLE: Well, sometime when the tape is off, I'll tell you a couple of stories about that visit.

Q: Is there anything else, any other crises that you can think of, or situations during that particular time?

EARLE: Well, the one that occurs to me, which shows...I don't know, either the fragility or the strength of the alliance, was this one year, I guess it was '70 or '71...

Each year, the NATO countries file what they call the defense planning questionnaire, the DPQ, which basically represents a commitment of forces for the ensuing year.

We had always committed two carriers to the Med, full time. And the powers that were, in Washington, wanted to pull one of those carriers out and send it to the Seventh Fleet and the Vietnam War.

We had been the strongest complainers when people didn't live up to DPQ commitments, or didn't get their DPQs in on time, because we always did it and we... (This is something we did a lot of, the DPQ—just to talk about what the staff did.) And it was a very embarrassing and difficult summer, because we weren't living up to our commitment either to get the paper in or, when the paper went in, it wasn't going to be what they wanted us to say.

And the alliance jumped all over us, and I thought that was kind of... It was annoying at the time for me, because I took the big brunt as well as the ambassador. But, in retrospect, it was pretty healthy that they weren't going to put up with the Americans having a double standard.

That's one of the situations where the country ambassadors were brought in. I mean, we were sending cables out, or Washington was sending cables to the ambassadors in the UK and in Italy and so forth, saying, you know: Explain why this is happening and so forth and so on.

It was an interesting team effort by the USG to make the best of a bad situation, and also of the NATO countries to kind of pummel us a little bit.

Q: Well, you were at a time there while the Vietnam War was still... I mean, we were pulling out of Vietnam under Nixon, but...

EARLE: The real pull-outs hadn't begun very much.

Q: So were you getting the feeling from your NATO allies that you Americans are degrading your armed forces here in NATO in order to fight this colonial war?

EARLE: Well, obviously, in this DPQ, we were. We weren't otherwise. Oh, we were pulling some equipment out, but they sort of understood it. They didn't like the war. They never complained about it, because it wasn't the right place to complain. I mean, if they wanted to complain, they'd complain to their ambassadors in Washington, who'd complain to the administration. So they kind of left us alone on it. But other than that, and some diminution of some kind of aircraft and so forth, we didn't pull a lot out for Vietnam.

Q: Was there any feeling that the military was going through this disintegration? Or did this come later, a problem of morale the military was suffering towards the end of the Vietnam War?

EARLE: No, no. It's amazing how really, looking at it, just at the American military, how sort of...well, they were more than resigned, they were really kind of relaxed about Vietnam. You didn't get a sense that: Oh, God, why are they killing all my friends from West Point? or that sort of thing. I think there was the usual military frustration: Why don't they let us go all out? But, in retrospect, it was really interesting that they didn't seem to have very strong feelings about it. And the allies, as I say, kind of left us alone, because they knew this wasn't the forum to complain.

Q: Well, then, in '73 you moved in and really were to spend the rest of your time, up through '81, in arms control. How did this come about?

EARLE: Like the Vassar girl in the whorehouse. The customer says, “How did a girl like you get here?”

And she says, “Just lucky, I guess.”

Just to tell you the personal side of it, when I was in the Pentagon, I became close to Nitze, because Clifford and Warnke worked together, and when they'd go on trips to Vietnam or NATO or wherever, then Nitze was acting secretary and I was acting assistant secretary, so then I worked with Nitze. I practically never saw Clifford when I was in the Pentagon; I saw Nitze almost every day.

And, as you perhaps know...interesting, I think other departments have adopted it since, but at that time, if I'm not in error, the Pentagon was the only place where the deputy secretary could sign any paper that the secretary could, even if the secretary were in his office. So that really it was a very shared responsibility.

Anyway, I saw a lot of Nitze. And when Nitze was on the first SALT delegation and they would come to NATO... I remember the first time was in July of '69. They didn't even begin the talks with the Soviets until November of '69.

And that was a powerful group: Gerry Smith was the chairman; and Nitze was the OSD rep.; and Tommy Thompson was the State rep.; and Royal Allison was the JCS rep.; and Ray Garthoff was the Executive Secretary; and Phil Farley was the deputy chief of delegation.

Anyway, when Paul Nitze and Phyllis would come to Brussels, they'd stay with us. We had become close personal friends; my wife and I went to Vienna one weekend and went to the opera with them and so forth.

I did not want to be in the government when Richard Nixon was reelected. It was one thing to work for him after he'd been, but I just didn't want to be around. So I resigned as of two days before the election, to go back to my law firm.

I was sort of cleaning up my responsibilities in the Pentagon, and I went by to say goodbye to Paul. He asked me to come for dinner that night, and just he and Phyllis and I had dinner. He was losing his chief of staff on his portion of the SALT delegation, and he asked

me if I would like to come and do it. I had no interest in doing it. I had just burned a lot of bridges, I'd put children back in school in Philadelphia, and I'd committed myself to going back to my law firm. And anyway, it was about three levels below the job I'd had. And Phyllis Nitze raised hell with Paul and said it was an outrageous suggestion, and he agreed that it was. But he said, “Would you be a consultant?” And that was a real siren call.

I went back. It made it very hard for me to readjust to my law practice. I don't think I ever really did.

Q: What kind of law were you doing?

EARLE: I was a general practitioner: corporate law, litigation.

Q: It must have been a little hard.

EARLE: Yes, to go back to Philadelphia and pick up the same old clients and the same old work. So Paul said, “Will you be a consultant?” Well, I'd hardly been back in the firm, and he called me and he said SALT II is going to begin in a week or something. I had been back in the firm two weeks, and I came down here and went out to Andrews and got on an airplane, and we flew to Geneva to begin the SALT II talks. So I've actually been to every session of SALT II, even though I wasn't a full member of the delegation at the outset.

Q: Could you explain what SALT II is.

EARLE: Strategic Arms Limitations Talk, Part Two, so to speak. In May of 1972, SALT I was completed, and that consisted of the antiballistic missile, ABM, treaty and the limited agreement on offensive weapons, which was a five- year agreement basically freezing ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile) launchers and SLBM (submarine-launched ballistic missile) launchers. It was then agreed that once the treaty and the agreement were ratified and approved by, in the one case, the Senate, in the other case, both Houses, that SALT

II, the next round of talks, would begin. And they were scheduled and did in fact begin in November of 1972.

And that was when I went with the delegation as a consultant to Paul Nitze, and I spent two weeks in Geneva. It was very exciting, to think of sitting across the table from the Soviet Union. The only real, live Soviet I'd ever seen was a major in Berlin. And I was thrilled. At the first US-Soviet luncheon I sat next to Victor Karpov, then a middle level adviser. He speaks very good English. Little did he and I know that five years later we'd be running our respective delegations.

So I spent two weeks, and I went back to my law firm, unhappily, and then I think I went to Geneva for two weeks in February. And then the delegation wanted me to draft the charter of the Standing Consultative Commission, which was a group formed by SALT I to oversee compliance, among other things, with the SALT I agreements. And I was there really as a lawyer, although I did help Paul with a number of statements, drafting statements and so forth. But the last two times I went, it was as a lawyer.

And then I was on vacation in August of '73, and Paul called me and said that Sid Graybeal, who had been the ACDA representative, had become the SCC commissioner and he could not do both jobs. So the ACDA job was open and was I interested. And, of course, I was. And I came down here to Washington and met with Fred Ikl#, the director of ACDA, (for four years my wife thought his name was Clay and his first name was Freddie, which is understandable). And to my astonishment, I mean, Fred is, I would say, a fairly conservative Republican, but I guess it was on the Nitze recommendation and also...well, whatever, he offered me the job as his man in Geneva.

And so I went off on the first of October...well, I came to Washington for about a week of briefings. It was funny. Again, even though I knew something about what I was getting into, I really didn't know very much about it. I had gone to a meeting at the State Department, four years before, with Paul Nitze, something called the Committee of Principals, which

was then the guiding light for arms control. And Dean Rusk was the chairman, and there was a very distinguished-looking man across the table from me, and I whispered to Paul, “Who's that?”

And he said, “That's Bill Foster.”

And I said, “What does he do?”

He said, “Oh, he's director of ACDA.”

And I said, “What's ACDA?”

So that was my knowledge of the arms control world.

And I remember, when I took the job full time, thinking “God, I will never be able to remember the difference between the SS-17 and the SS-19,” two Soviet MIRVed (multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle) ICBMs. Well, it wasn't more than a few months before I could diagram both of them for you, and tell you the throw weight and so forth.

So I went over with some confidence. And I had a couple of wonderful people working for me. Jim Timbie, who was then about twenty-nine, who still is, I think, the senior SALT advisor to Secretary Baker and Eagleburger now, a math Ph.D. from Chicago. And some other really excellent people, who belonged to me. Each delegate had his own staff, and I got wonderful support from them. And Nitze and I were very close. Alex Johnson had become the chief of delegation; Gerry Smith only went to the first meeting. My b#te noire, Ed Rowny, had become the JCS rep. Well, Ed I had known for years, because he was in Brussels. He was the vice chairman of the military committee in Brussels. The vice chairman of the military committee is always American because of the nuclear element. The chairman is never American; the vice chairman is always American. So the delegation was Johnson and Nitze, Rowny, Boris Klosson from State, myself, and the at-large

member was Harold Brown, who was then president of Cal Tech. He had been secretary of the Air Force.

Q: And later became secretary of defense.

EARLE: Yes, yes. He had been the at-large member through SALT I, and continued right up until Jimmy Carter's election as the at-large member of the delegation.

Q: What were sort of your marching orders as you went in there? I mean, real marching orders, rather than for the betterment of the world or something like that.

EARLE: Well, the delegation functioned then, and I presume still functions this way: the delegation receives a cable from the White House, which says: “The president has approved the following instructions for the SALT delegation.” And there follow anywhere from four to eight paragraphs, usually running about a page and a half of single-spaced goals.

For instance: equal aggregates. That is, we want the Soviets to agree in this treaty that... Equal aggregates in central systems, that both sides will have the same gross number of ICBM launchers, SLBM launchers, and heavy bombers.

That verification shall include a ban on the encryption of telemetry from missiles being tested that would impede verification of the treaty.

That there be sublimits on ICBM launchers. That there be sublimits on the number launchers of MIRVed ICBMs at certain numbers.

In SALT I (at which I was never present except for that one weekend in Vienna when we went to the opera and I just said hello to people), apparently the delegation was under an obligation to clear everything with Washington before doing it. Even the plenary statements, which were basically briefs arguing for positions, had to be cleared in Washington. And, of course, treaty language was drafted in Washington. I just don't see

how they were able to get anything done under that system. Gerry Smith, who was then chief negotiator, is a very competent guy—it must have been just hell to function that way.

Fortunately for us, Alex Johnson came in. He did not come from ACDA. One thing that Henry Kissinger wanted to do in SALT II was to get ACDA, which he considered a bunch of peaceniks, into a lesser role, even though it was the arms control agency. And, as you know, thanks to Senator Scoop Jackson, there was sort of a purge of that delegation. Garthoff left, and Royal Allison's Air Force career ended. I don't think Gerry Smith was purged, but he didn't like what was going on and he left. So Nitze was the only carry-over from the SALT I delegation into the SALT II delegation. And Alex Johnson, who came out of the State Department, as you know, at that time was the only career ambassador in the Foreign Service. And he'd been ambassador to everywhere: Czechoslovakia, Thailand, Japan, deputy in Vietnam.

I'll tell you an interesting story about Alex, though, and his European experience.

Alex said I'm just not going to do it this way. I'm an ambassador, I'm a big boy, I can write my own statements. And later, when it came to drafting treaty language, I and others, we drafted every single word of that treaty, in Geneva, and only asked Washington clearance if we weren't sure what Washington's instructions meant. This is no criticism of Gerry, because it wasn't his fault, but frankly we did a much better job because we were there eight or ten hours a day working on this thing.

Q: How did you keep the NSC and Henry Kissinger sort of out of the micromanaging of this?

EARLE: Well, Alex, I think, managed. Henry knows that Alex is a true blue career Foreign Service officer, who's going to do what he's told and isn't going to do something that he's told not to do.

How much did we know about the back channel? The back channel being the unpublicized negotiations between Kissinger, on the one hand, and Dobrynin...

Q: Dobrynin being the Soviet ambassador to the United States for twenty years or something like that.

EARLE: Right. Or Gromyko. Henry Kissinger was highly secretive. As you perhaps know, he made a visit to Moscow, and Jake Beam, the United States ambassador, didn't know he was there until the day he left, four days after he arrived. I mean, I find that absolutely outrageous that somebody would do that to an ambassador.

And I remember when Mac Toon was going to be ambassador to Moscow, and he said to me, “Well, how much do you know about the back channel, on the delegation?”

And I said, “Not a hell of a lot.”

Henry would come to Geneva and meet with Gromyko in the Intercontinental Hotel, which was a quarter of a mile from our delegation, and would not even have Alex present. Nobody from the delegation was present. And then Henry would go away and he'd send one of his staff down to brief Alex privately. And Alex, who is a secretive man himself, would then brief the delegation.

So I said to Mac Toon, “Well, I think that Henry's guy tells Alex about sixty percent of what's happened. And then Alex tells us about sixty percent of what he's been told. So I figure I'm thirty-six percent informed of what goes on in the back channel.” And that's not very much. It was also very frustrating and annoying, because we were confident that Semenov, who was the chief Soviet negotiator, was getting a hundred percent of what went on at those meetings. So it put us at a considerable disadvantage.

Q: I did an interview with George Vest, who was working on that unspeakable name, Council for the...

EARLE: CSCE?

Q: CSCE, the...

EARLE: Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Q: And apparently Kissinger was telling things to the Soviets, Dobrynin and all, which would come back to the other delegates on this conference, through the East Germans, for example. Which was completely undercutting his position, because Kissinger felt that this was detracting from SALT, and saying don't pay any attention to what we're doing there and all.

EARLE: It's a lousy way to negotiate. It's a lousy way to support your staff. It's just a lousy way to do things. You know, knowledge is power, and I suppose Henry thought that that was important. As I say, I found it very, very frustrating.

Compared to later on, when I was running the delegation and Cy Vance was the secretary of state... He had a lot of private meetings with Dobrynin. And either he, or usually Marshall Shulman, his special advisor for Soviet affairs, would telephone me on the secure phone right after the meeting and tell me what had happened. And when he met with Gromyko, he always took me with him, or Warnke. He always took me to Moscow, because Warnke wasn't there the whole time. If Warnke was there, we both went. I didn't go to all the meetings in New York, but I went to all the meetings in Moscow and all the meetings in Geneva. And when they were in New York, Warnke, who was in Washington, would go.

Q: Did you feel that this type of back-channel activity was impeding the progress or not? How did you feel about that?

EARLE: Oh, probably in the long run it didn't make an awful lot of difference, but it sure was painful. I think it probably slowed it up a little bit, because the Soviets would make

a proposal that they expected us to accept, because Henry had already agreed to it in private, and we'd say, “That's not very good.” And then eventually Henry would remember to tell us that that was good. That sort of thing.

When it was done more openly—under Vance—I think that it was helpful. All of us were then playing off the same sheet of music.

Q: How did you find the Soviets, both in their dealings and what were they after?

EARLE: Well, the Soviet delegation was very much like our delegation in that there were some good guys on it and there were some guys on it that weren't so good. I mean, that you liked or didn't like and so forth. I don't know about SALT I, but I found, when we began as SALT II, that either they were very uneducated about the overlying issues—for instance, strategic stability—or they sure played awfully dumb about it. Because they didn't seem to respond at all. They kept talking about “equality and equal security”, and nobody ever knew what that meant. They still talk about equality and equal security. We think it now means something like strategic stability, but we're not sure, because they don't articulate what it means very well. As you know, they're terribly long winded, and they talk in kind of circles a lot, and they're intensely repetitive.

Anyway, where were they coming from? I think that they were genuinely interested in achieving a balanced, fair treaty which benefitted both countries. I think they really were. And we were. It was just painful getting there, because neither one of us trusted the other at all, and therefore any proposal that either side made was so dissected and scrutinized and analyzed and so forth. It's a very slow process.

One of the problems, and I always contrast it to my base negotiations with the Spanish... In that case every agency of the United States government was unanimous that we wanted the base treaty renewed for five years. The only issue really was: How much are we going to pay for them? And, since that was largely a function of the Department of Defense, as long as I and the other people doing it kept our noses clean and so forth,

State really didn't play a very big role. When I went to do it with the Spanish, the only State guy with me was one of the people from the legal advisor's office. I mean, they did not send a policy person with me, because the goal was obvious and so on.

SALT's an entirely different matter. Everybody wanted a SALT agreement, but everybody wanted a different SALT agreement. And the other complication, or difficulty, was that the elephants in Washington—the Secretaries of Defense, State, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the President—they were all interested. And in the Spanish base negotiations, as I said, nobody cared as long as we got the deal and didn't pay too much and Clark Clifford was satisfied—I mean, Rusk got himself into it a little bit— but as long as, as I say, things were going along smoothly.

So the Soviets would make a proposal to us, let's say, on cruise missiles. We probably wouldn't respond to the proposal for several months. And people have asked me, “God, how could you conduct a negotiation like that?”

I said, “That's just the way it worked.” The same, we'd make a proposal to them. Months would pass.

I'd say to Semenov, “Are you ever going to tell us?”

“It's being studied in Moscow, and we'll give you our answer in due course.”

The plenary meetings we had (this is when I became chief of delegation, but the same was true when Alex was doing it), I'd talk about ICBM launchers, and they might talk about cruise missiles. And then the next week, I might talk about SLBM launchers, and they might talk about verification. And if we spoke on the same subject, it was purely accidental. Except when we got down to the last few months, when, then, Karpov and I met constantly and we actually set out agendas for ourselves; e.g., on Monday we'll talk about this subject, and on Tuesday we'll talk about that subject. But in the overall six and a

half years, that didn't happen until less than six months before the end, so that for over six years, we were, in a sense, ships passing in the night, in terms of our address of issues.

Now in the private meetings, which always took place after each plenary, where the chiefs of delegation would meet in a private room with just their interpreters, and especially as we approached the end, we had many, many more chiefs of delegation meetings, there we did have a discussion. But at the plenary meetings, where we were making these formal statements and formal proposals (I called them our Letters to Moscow, because we not only made the statement at the table, we'd give them a copy of it, and they'd do the same), there was almost no dialogue.

Q: Well then, what were you doing? I mean, a meeting is supposed to be a certain amount of dialogue, but it doesn't sound like there was a dialogue here.

EARLE: No dialogue at all. We tried, Paul Warnke and I. Paul, when he was the chief negotiator, was only there about ten percent of the time, because he was also director of ACDA, so basically I was usually the chief negotiator. But Paul is a trial lawyer, far more experienced than I, but I'm a trial lawyer too.

So Paul said, “Let's get these guys talking. This is awful, this reading statements at each other...”

So Paul would begin to talk at the end of the meeting. Up until then, for eight years, the only discussion at the end of the meeting was when and where the next meeting would take place. And Paul would say, “Now that's a very interesting proposal you've made, Mr. Minister. I wonder if you'd explain a little bit more why you made...”

And the sheer consternation on the Soviet side!

And then I did it, too, with virtually no result.

And one day, at a reception in my apartment, Karpov, who was then the number two guy in the delegation, who spoke better English than his interpreters, came up to me and he said, “Ralph, would you please not extemporize at the table.”

And I said, “Why not, Victor?”

He said, “It makes me very nervous.”

And I said, “Why does it make you nervous?”

He said, “Because it makes Minister Semenov nervous, and when he's nervous, I'm nervous.”

Even in the private meetings, Semenov would sit down, and he would reach in his pocket, and he would pull out a stack of folded notes, ranging in thickness from one to four inches, which always gave me some indication of how late my lunch would be. Because the plenary meetings were at eleven, the statements were each about twenty minutes long — fifteen minutes long, but there were consecutive translations—so basically the formal meeting took about an hour. So it was noon when we would break up.

Alex Johnson imposed a dry rule. Theretofore, in SALT I, in the informal meetings after the plenaries, there was vodka and cognac and wine. But sometimes these post-plenary meetings would run for three or four hours, which wasn't very good for anybody's kidneys. So Alex made a deal with Semenov at the very outset of SALT II, there would be no more alcohol, which was a very good, smart thing to do, because sometimes, as I say, we'd be there for four hours. I would bring up a subject, and you could see Semenov leafing through his notes, and then he would read a response to me. Or he would want to talk about something, and then he would read to me. I mean, this is in a one-on-one meeting. He was very structured but there was some spontaneity, but maybe twenty percent of it was extemporaneous and eighty percent was...

An example: I forget what the provision was, but, after months of discussion of it, there had been back and forth and compromises, and finally I came in and I said, “Mr. Minister, I'd like to start off by telling you that with respect to Paragraph Eight of Article Six, we accept the Soviet proposal for the language for that paragraph.”

He's going through his papers, and he pulls out his note for Paragraph Eight of Article Six, and he begins to read to me why I ought to accept his proposal. Because that's the paper he had on that particular issue.

Now, when he reported to Moscow, I bet the sequence was reversed, that he made the argument and then I accepted. But I'd accepted it, and then he made the argument why I should accept it.

Karpov was a little freer, because Karpov was younger and Karpov's English was perfect, or nearly perfect, and we had a better...well, we were exactly the same age. Semenov was a lot older than I, and it bothered him a lot when I became chief negotiator, because I was younger. He tried to give me a very hard time initially.

Warnke came over, the new team. I'd just been a member, and, in '77, Warnke came over as the chief negotiator and director of ACDA, and I was the alternate chief. So Warnke was there for about three weeks, and Semenov was very happy to deal with Warnke—senior official in the administration and so forth—Semenov being a deputy foreign minister himself. So Warnke went home after a few weeks, not to return for several months. I had gone to all the private meetings, with Warnke, because Paul knew that he wasn't going to be there very long.

So I went to my first private meeting with Semenov. And, unlike every other meeting at the Soviet mission, he was not at the door to greet me. The interpreter was there. Took me in the back room, and instead of the big spread of little sandwiches and tea and coffee, there was one teapot and two cups and two cookies, I think. And I sat down, and I expressed to

Semenov the pleasure of continuing to work with him, and I hoped that we would get along well, and we had lots of work to do. This was translated. And he sat there. And then there was a pause and he said, “Well, if that's all you have to say, I guess this meeting is over.”

And I said, in effect, wait a minute. What do you mean the meeting is over? It just started.

Well, he said, “I don't have anything to say to you.”

So this happened, in a similar way, once or twice more. And finally I went over and I said, “Look, the American expression is 'I'm the only game in town.' Now if you're not going to talk to me, I'm just going to have to tell Washington that the Soviet Union is withdrawing from the talks.”

God, I didn't know what he was going to do. He had been so damn unpleasant. But he then seemed to relax. And then, about a week later, he invited me to have dinner in his apartment with his family, which he had never invited Alex Johnson to do, and had never invited Gerry Smith to do. And we all had a lot to drink, and we had a good time, and we were basically friends thereafter. But I think it was kind of stupid of him. I don't know what he thought I was going to do— burst into tears, or call Paul and say hurry back, I need you, or whatever. It was kind of an attempt to bully me, I think.

Q: Probably it was the age-rank business.

EARLE: It was, and that I'd been there first just as a consultant, and then as the ACDA member, and now here I was as a peer. He was bothered by it. But, actually, I think in the long run I got along with him better than... I think he and Gerry Smith got along well, but I know I got along with him much better than Alex did, because Alex is rather like that, too —I mean, senior diplomat. And I don't think Alex would have liked to have had somebody come up from the ranks.

Q: It's almost hard to conceive of these long-term discussions going on really year after year, with people reading past each other. What was going on? Was it just because this was where the plates collided or something?

EARLE: Well, let me sort of give you a little bit of the summary of what went on in Geneva, and then sort of broaden it from there.

The delegations were roughly forty or forty-five people each, including translators, interpreters, secretaries. Probably twenty-five substantive people on each. As I said, each member had his own little staff. And that was up to him how many he had, because his agency paid for it. Ed Rowny, the JCS rep., had his own interpreter. None of the rest of us did, we used a pool of interpreters.

Basically, we had two plenary meetings a week, on Tuesday and Friday. It was a home-and-home arrangement, where these formal statements were read. It was very lawyer-like business. Basically, these were briefs: Why you should accept my position; rationale; argument, etc.

When we got into the serious... Well, I really don't know what we did the first two years, because there was no treaty language on the table, and we just made endless statements about the importance of throw weight, the importance of equal aggregates. It wasn't until after Vladivostok, which was in November of '74, that each side tabled...

Q: This was where President Ford met with Brezhnev...

EARLE: Ford met with Brezhnev, and nobody expected anything to happen. But basically they agreed on a framework for the treaty.

So we went back in February of '75, and the Soviets put a treaty on the table—bang, like that. And about a month later, we put a draft treaty.

And then we formed the drafting group. Boris Klosson, who was the State rep., and I were the American representatives, with Tom Graham, who was the general counsel of ACDA, on it. And they had Karpov and Smolin, who was a very smart, competent guy, on their side.

And the drafting group met twice a week, to try and resolve difficulties...well, there were many difficulties— disagreements. And we came up with, which I'm sure is normal in diplomatic practice, a treaty with brackets around the disputed proposals. But we ironed out a lot of language. If the Soviets said “each side shall be limited to X bombers”, and our language said “neither side shall have in excess of X bombers”, that language, obviously, the preparatory language, could easily be dealt with by the drafting group, obviously always ad referendum to the chiefs of delegation, ad referendum to delegations, ad referendum to governments. And so you'd agree on the noncontroversial language. And then, if our number was 500 bombers and their number was 600 bombers, 500 would go in square brackets with a “1” and 600 would go in square brackets with a “2”; “2” being the Soviets and “1” being the US So that it crystallized and identified the substantive issues that had to be resolved.

So there were two drafting group meetings a week, two plenary meetings, and then miscellaneous other contacts. We tried to establish two other panels, the drafting group and two more: the verification panel and a definitions panel. And that didn't work at all, they just didn't want to play with that, so we ended up, everything was in the drafting group. And, as I say, then there were miscellaneous meetings: Smolin and Karpov would have lunch with Boris and me, or there would be receptions, there were lunches. They were always business; the only thing you could talk about that wasn't business was the movies in Geneva that we'd seen.

This went on, as I say. Once the treaty was on the table, we had constant meetings of the delegation, because you were drafting the statements for the plenary meetings, you were reviewing the actions of the drafting group.

When I became chief of delegation, I insisted that nobody have a meeting with the Soviets without meeting with the members beforehand and discussing what they were going to talk about, because we had a few embarrassing situations where newcomers told the Soviets things that they should not have told them, but didn't realize that they were. So I imposed this rule that nobody talk to the Soviets until at least they talked to me before they did it. And there were a lot of these meetings. So that was the atmosphere in Geneva.

In the Nixon and Ford administrations, we'd be over there for two months and then come home for two months. And that's what they've been doing now in the Reagan and Bush administrations. In the Carter administration, as I like to say, we were there thirteen months a year. I mean, we just never, ever stopped. We got two weeks off for Christmas, that sort of thing. And frankly I think that's the way it ought to be done. I don't see any point in coming home for two months, you can do plenty with cables.

Now, back home, we'd get these instructions from the president, which would last you for months. There was a Backstopping Committee, which, if we had questions about what a particular instruction meant, we would ask. Sometimes they would volunteer amplifications of the instructions.

I'm not sure if I'm answering your questions.

Q: No, you are, you're giving... Now how about within our delegation and then in the backstopping thing, were the civilians going one way and the military going another?

EARLE: That's a very difficult problem here. And I think Alex Johnson found it particularly frustrating, because, in his previous incarnations as ambassador (and as you know better than I, the ambassador is the boss), everybody works for the ambassador and

they do what the ambassador tells them. Well, I represented Fred Ikl#, I didn't work for Alex Johnson. And Ed Rowny represented the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And Paul Nitze and, subsequently, Michael May, represented Mel Laird or Jim Schlesinger.

And I must say, when I became chief of delegation, I had the same anguish that Alex Johnson had had: these guys didn't work for me. It was a bunch of very senior officials. I mean, here you have Paul Nitze a member of the delegation, and he'd been deputy secretary of defense and secretary of the Navy. You had Harold Brown, who had been secretary of the Air Force. You had Ed Rowny or Royal Allison, three-star generals. You had Tommy Thompson, who had been ambassador to the Soviet Union. They're senior enough to give any chief of delegation pause. But then each also had his mentor back home: the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the director of ACDA, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff. So being head of the SALT delegation is different from other chiefs of mission—you are the chairman of a committee.

Now Alex took the position (and I fully accepted it when he did it, and I continued it) that the final decision was his, and if you don't like it, that's just tough. And you can go to the Secretary of Defense and get me fired, but we cannot sit around here all day long and have you tell me the Secretary of Defense doesn't want to do it that way. Because we have instructions from the President, and my interpretation of those instructions is to do it this way, and we're going to do it this way. That very seldom was necessary, except with Ed Rowny, whom I had to overrule constantly for this. Everybody was on my...[tape ended]

Q: You get excited when you talk about Ed Rowny. I'd like you to talk a little about him.

EARLE: Well, Ed and I are sort of friends. We've known each other a long time. Ed just took an entirely different attitude toward the negotiations than the rest of us. He's a great believer that there's a Communist under every bed and that they're going to get us one way or the other. And I think the thing that I would criticize Ed for...I mean, I think he was wrong to think the way he did, and the way he still thinks. What I would criticize him for

was that he found it very difficult to implement the orders of the President of the United States, which, for a serving officer in the United States Army, is not a good thing. He really thought that basically it was wrong to get a treaty. And therefore he basically opposed progress. And it was an endless, endless...

President Carter said to me one day, “Do you know why I made you chief of delegation?”

I said, “No, Mr. President, why did you make me chief of delegation?”

He said, “You're the only man in America patient enough to deal with Ed Rowny.”

Hours and hours of explanations, rationale, and the rest of the delegation getting restive and getting up and going to the bathroom and not coming back for half an hour because they knew it wasn't going to end. And Ed and I just grinding away. And then finally I'd have to say at the end, “Okay, Ed, I'm sorry, we're going to do it this way. I've tried to get you on my side.”

Q: Well, did you have problems, say, when you were at the joint meeting with the Soviets, of you'd make a statement and then you'd find out that Rowny or somebody would be rolling their eyes and looking up?

EARLE: I don't think it was that obvious, but I think there was a certain amount of that. The Soviets also found him very frustrating. After the treaty was signed in Vienna, we went back to Geneva to pack our bags, so to speak, and I had a farewell... Just the people who were left. Part of our delegation had gone home and part of theirs. But they came.

And their senior general, Colonel-General Biletsky, took me aside. It was a very interesting conversation. He'd been the hero at Kurtsk or Stalingrad or someplace and was a real ground-pounder. I mean, he did not appear to be what you might call a sophisticated... But he'd been there for three or four years, or maybe longer.

The deed is done, the treaty is signed, we're never going to see each other again, candor can be expected.

He said, “When I came on the delegation, I thought it was the worst job anybody could give me. I now realize it's the most important job I've ever had in my life, and I'm very happy with what we've done.”

(It was the first time I ever saw him have more than one drink, so he'd had a couple.)

And he said, “I really apologize to you, Mr. Ambassador, that we (the military) got so little done. But frankly we just couldn't get anything done with your man.”

It was touching. It didn't surprise me at all. Ed just felt that we shouldn't be doing what we were doing.

Q: Well, how did he stay on?

EARLE: He was the prot#g# of Senator Henry Jackson, and later of Senator Jesse Helms.

Q: Jackson was the senator from Washington.

EARLE: Right. Who was a Democrat, now deceased. On domestic politics, very liberal, but on Soviet matters, very hawkish. And when the purge that I mentioned earlier took place and Royal Allison really lost his career in the Air Force because Jackson did not like his answers at the ratification hearings, it was agreed in the Pentagon, it was my understanding, that the next JCS rep. would be Navy, Allison being Air Force. The Air Force owns the bombers and the ICBMs; the Navy owns the SLBMs. So the next guy should be an admiral. And the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, who at that time was...I forget whether it was Tom Moorer or George Brown, routinely sent an admiral's name to the White House for approval.

And one day, before we were to go to...it was the second trip that I made with the SALT II delegation as a consultant, I was in Nitze's office. It was February '73. And the first meeting I'd been to with the old delegation, Gerry Smith, Royal Allison, and so forth. And they'd all gone, so Nitze was the only survivor. And Nitze was fussing. He said, I don't know why the White House hasn't approved Admiral so and so. And the phone rang, and he said, “Really? That's interesting.” He hung up and he said, “Have you ever heard of an Army general named Rowny?”

I said, “Sure, I know him well. He's in NATO, he's been there for three years. He's the vice chairman of the military committee.”

He said, “Well, he's been named the JCS rep. on the delegation.”

And I made a few comments.

And Nitze said, “Those are sort of astonishing comments. Do you mind if I get a second opinion?”

I said, “Of course not.”

Well, Eagleburger was up in ISA at the time. He was a deputy in ISA for policy planning. And so Nitze calls Eagleburger, because Eagleburger had been in Brussels, you know, listens on the phone, hangs up, and says, “Whew! Boy! You understated the problem.”

So it was clear, and it's now known, that Jackson told the White House they had to send Rowny. And, throughout the period, he was reporting to Richard Perle, who was then Jackson's administrative assistant.

Q: Who has always been a hawk's hawk as opposed to the Soviet Union.

EARLE: Right, right. Yes, I remember at one meeting in Geneva, we were in a delegation meeting, and Ed Rowny's secretary was sick, and there was a substitute who, I guess,

didn't know how to do things. So she came in to the meeting, and, instead of handing him a piece of paper, she announced: “Mr. Perle's on the secure phone.” Well, the only secure phone he could have been on was in Ed's office in the Pentagon.

And then, as you know, Ed...well, they say he resigned. He didn't resign. He had been extended beyond his age and grade by the chiefs, who were sort of intimidated because of the Jackson connection, who was the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. He'd been extended beyond his age and grade and was destined to retire immediately after the treaty was signed. In fact, he asked me to see if I could arrange for him to stay in his house at Fort McNair another month after the Vienna summit, and Harold Brown turned him down. So I get outraged when the media reports that he resigned as a matter of principle. Because he was retired.

Q: What happened... In this period, you didn't mention the change between the Ford and Carter administrations.

EARLE: Well, it was very interesting. As you know, the election was very close, and the polls were very close, and we didn't know who was going to win. I guess the prediction was that Carter would win by more than he did win by. And I remember Alex Johnson calling me into his office. By this time, Alex had begun to take me to all his private meetings, I guess because I had, to be immodest, a mastery of the treaty that was greater than others', because I had drafted so much of it. And so I'd become sort of a sounding board for Alex. And he said, “What do you think we ought to do if Carter wins?”

And I thought for a minute and I said, “Alex, I think it's one of those hypotheticals that we can't even address until it happens. I haven't got a clue what we ought to do. When it happens, we'll know what to do, but I don't think...”

I'm sure you've been in situations like that, where you know you can't decide it until you're faced with it.

When Carter was elected, it was clear: wind it up and go home. There was no point going on in a lame-duck situation. We had two more meetings with the Soviets, and they understood completely, and we went home.

And then we sat around. I was very unhappy with the Carter transition people, who spoke only to Alex, of all the members on the SALT delegation, and spoke to him only about housing in Geneva. There was absolutely no substantive... I've been through five transitions, and every one is worse than the previous one.

Q: It doesn't seem to get better, does it?

EARLE: It gets worse. The new guys always think they know better because they were able to beat the other guys or get elected. I remember Adam Yarmolinsky talking about getting involved in Vietnam, and he said, “You know, if you can elect a forty-three-year-old Irish Catholic president of the United States, you think you can do anything.”

So I sat around. I didn't know what I was going to do. I mean, I was the card-carrying Democrat on the delegation, and I had stayed in close contact with Paul Warnke. Actually, I wanted the ISA job. One of the transition people asked me what I wanted, and I said I want to be ISA. Funny thing was, the guy who asked me took the job himself.

Paul Warnke played it very close to the vest, because, as he told me later, when he had his hearings, he wanted to be able to say truthfully “I have discussed personnel with no one.” And I thought if he was going to talk to anybody, he'd talk to me. But he didn't talk to me, and I began to have a little hurt feelings. But then later he said that was why, he wanted to protect himself in the hearings.

Paul resisted the job. He didn't want the job. And Carter had to ask him three times, I think, before he took the ACDA job. But he insisted on being the chief negotiator as well as ACDA, which Carter accepted as a condition.

And then he had those very difficult confirmation hearings, at which Paul Nitze attacked his integrity and his loyalty to the United States, and Senator Jackson climbed all over him. It was very, very unpleasant.

Q: I recall. I don't recall the details, but I remember this was a very bad show.

EARLE: It was a very bad show.

Q: I mean, these were gentlemen supposedly treating something in the national interest.

EARLE: Well, what happened was, Nitze got pinned down and he didn't know how to wiggle out of it. He'd been up there criticizing a lot of speeches that Warnke had made. And Warnke was getting more and more adamant. And then, at the end, I think it was Senator McIntyre, who was in favor of Warnke, who said, “Well, Mr. Nitze, you're up here complaining. You and Mr. Warnke just disagree on a lot of issues. Or are you saying that you're a better American than he is?”

And Nitze said, “I guess I'd have to say the latter.”

And then it hit the fan.

So, anyway, Paul Warnke went through a very, very unpleasant... However, he was confirmed. But they got forty votes against him for chief negotiator, which was a signal that “We can beat your treaty, Warnke,” because you only need thirty- four to beat a treaty.

Well, then Paul asked me to be his alternate, stay on the delegation and be the alternate chairman. And he got a new job created for me. They created a new statutory position; it's called US representative for arms control and disarmament negotiations, in ACDA. It's a level-four job, because Paul, I think, wanted me to be on the same level as Spurgeon Keeny, who was going to be his deputy director. I've never really discussed this, but in looking at it objectively, it was a brilliant diplomatic, bureaucratic ploy by Paul. Because,

even though he only spent about ten percent of his time in Geneva, I was only the alternate and acting chief negotiator, so whom do I call, not formally report to, but call, is Paul. So that he got a handle on the negotiations which he would not have had if he'd only been director of the arms control agency and somebody like Alex Johnson was the chief negotiator.

And then the delegation was changed somewhat. Rowny stayed on. I urged the White House to appoint somebody new. The White House made a mistake. I talk about the White House, I'm really, I guess, talking about Hamilton Jordan.

Q: He was the chief of staff to...

EARLE: President Carter. They thought that if they could continue to placate Senator Jackson, he might vote for a SALT treaty, and therefore they let Rowny stay on the delegation. I said, “If you'd fired him, he would have just been another disgruntled general, complaining.” But he was able to stay on, and then do this “resignation in principle,” and get a much bigger voice against the treaty than he ever would have had if they'd just let him retire.

So Rowny stayed, Paul nominally the chief, I was the alternative chief. Boris Klosson stayed briefly. They made a mistake and replaced Boris with a guy not nearly as good as he. And we got Jerry Johnson as the OSD rep., who's a good fellow.

But meanwhile there had been no discussions. This was from November, a week after Carter's election. In late March, Vance...

Q: This would be '77. Seventy-six was the election.

EARLE: Yes, so this was March of '77. Vance and a group of us went to Moscow, where he made the so-called Comprehensive Proposal, which went beyond Vladivostok and which, to me, didn't have a prayer in hell (but nobody asked me) of being accepted. When

I saw it on the plane to Moscow, I said it's going to be turned down in four days; I was wrong, they turned it down in two days.

It really didn't hurt very much, because we were back in Geneva within a month or six weeks. And we began the negotiations in early May, and sort of picked up where we'd left off, and plugged on from May of '77 until June of '79.

Q: But there was no real turn. I mean, you were going the way...

EARLE: It was an attempted turn to go beyond Vladivostok, and it failed. And also gave the critics of the eventual treaty ammunition, because they said, “Gee, if you'd only stuck to your guns, you would have had a better treaty.” So it was a political mistake; it really didn't hurt the negotiations very much.

Q: To sort of wind up on that, for the record, the SALT treaty...you got the approval of both delegations, and, I mean, they're supporting things, but SALT then went to the Senate.

EARLE: Well, we finished it in Geneva. Karpov and I initialed every page of four copies.

It's interesting. I don't know if you know about treaties, but there are two in each language. And in each language, one begins: The United States and the Soviet Union; and the other begins: The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States. And then, on the signature blocks, they're changed. And one of the English editions is on Soviet paper, and one is on American paper. The Soviet treaty paper is like cardboard. And they didn't have a word processor, and it took eight days to get the damn thing finished. Anyway, that's just a little aside.

We took it to Vienna, where Carter and Brezhnev signed it. And then we took it and we sent it up to the Senate, and the hearings began.

All in all, I testified forty-nine times between the ninth of July and the ninth of November, in different fora, the Senate Armed Services, Foreign Relations, and so on.

Long mark-up. The vote-counters, we needed a two-thirds vote, sixty-seven votes out of a hundred. We were cautiously optimistic that we had them. No matter how much Cy Vance, or Harold Brown, or Paul Warnke...well, Paul was out of the government, or I, or whoever it was lobbied, we all knew, or at least I think we all knew, I knew, that the most serious and effective lobbying was going to be done by other senators. And they hadn't really gone to work. I mean, the John Culvers and the Gary Harts and the Bob Byrds and the Frank Churches were going to begin to work on their colleagues. And I was really quite confident that we would get the treaty.

The banana peel, I call it, was this so-called phony Soviet brigade in Cuba that was “discovered.”

Q: Oh, yes.

EARLE: They had been there since 19...God knows how long. And Kennedy had said you can leave them there. But there was no institutional memory, if you'll forgive me, in the State Department.

Q: Well, this was actually a little bit of the rationale for beginning to try to do this oral history.

EARLE: So somebody knows what happens.

Q: Yes.

EARLE: Well, they didn't. A satellite picked up some vehicles in a field. I always had the feeling it was sort of like the National Guard, these Soviets were there as advisors and they made them go out in the field for two weeks every year. And I think that's about what

it was. And they'd been doing it for twenty-some years, but nobody had ever seen them before.

And everybody overreacted. I mean, even Cy Vance said, “We cannot accept the status quo.” Frank Church, who was running for reelection, said some damn fool thing about—I liked Frank Church, who is now dead—but, you know, “This cannot stay.”

And of course it did. I mean, the Soviets were stunned by our reaction. I was working with Lloyd Cutler, who was sort of the political head of the SALT ratification effort, and we had an office in the White House. And I remember the CIA came and showed us these pictures. I had been in the National Guard, and it looked like a National Guard encampment.

But it cost us six weeks, because they sort of suspended hearings while... But much more important, this may be exaggerated, but I think it permitted the Afghanistan invasion. Because as long as they thought we were going to ratify SALT, they weren't going to invade Afghanistan. And the furor about this damn brigade in Cuba, which was, from their point of view, completely concocted and phony, led them to believe, as Korniyenko, Gromyko's top deputy, told me in Vienna, “That showed us that Mr. Carter did not want SALT ratified.”

I said, “Come on, you've got to be kidding.”

He said, “No, it was clearly an intentional effort to mess up the relations between our two countries, and particularly the SALT ratification.”

I said, “Look, it was a stupid mistake. It was not intentional.”

And I remember he looked me right in the eye and he said, “No government could be that stupid.”

So I said, “Boy, you really don't know the United States.”

I honestly believe that if we'd handled that differently, or if it had never happened, that they would not have invaded Afghanistan.

Q: Afghanistan was in December of '79.

EARLE: Right, just at Christmastime. And the SALT treaty, we had finished the mark-up, it had been voted out of the Foreign Relations Committee, with approval. Although, unfortunately, instead of being ten-to-five, or whatever, we needed two- thirds, it was nine-to-six, because John Glenn got all excited about the problem of losing the radar stations in Iran. And he said, “I can't vote for this treaty if it can't be verified.” And I remember Bobby Inman and I went to see him, and Bobby convinced him it could be verified, but...

Q: Bobby Inman was an admiral in charge of the National Security Agency at the time.

EARLE: But it obviously was highly classified as to why we could compensate for these things, and that couldn't be made public, so John Glenn voted against it. He later said that now I'm satisfied and I would vote for it. So basically we came out ten-to-five, which was fine. It was number one on the executive agenda for the Senate, beginning January 5, or something, in 1980.

The day I became director of ACDA, which was, I think, January 3, there was a meeting at the White House to discuss responses to the Afghanistan invasion: don't go to the Olympics, grain embargoes, whatever.

I asked to go, or that maybe, if I hadn't been sworn in, Spurgeon Keeny, who was the acting director, go to that meeting. Because obviously, when you're dealing with punishment of the Soviet Union, arms control is a factor. And we were not invited.And apparently, at the end of the meeting, somebody said, “Well, why don't we withdraw SALT from the Senate calendar; that'll show 'em.” And so Carter signed a letter asking Byrd,

the majority leader, to withdraw the treaty from consideration. Which I'm told infuriated Senator Byrd, because he damn well ran the executive calendar, not the president. But he did withdraw it.

And there are a few of us, we are a very small minority, but there are a few of us, including, I think, John Culver, who was going to be the floor leader, who think it could have been ratified even after Afghanistan. Now, as I say, most people don't believe that, but I think it might have been.

Anyway, it was put in limbo.

Fortunately, our time wasn't wasted, because it was only to last until 1985, here we are in 1991 and both sides are basically still living up to the passive restraints in it.

Q: You were then with ACDA really at sort of the shank end of the Carter administration. Afghanistan had happened. This must have been sort of a dead-in-the-water time.

EARLE: Well, I was offered the job before Afghanistan. I was offered the choice of that or counselor in the State Department, and I thought ACDA would be better. Then Afghanistan. As I said to some newspaper reporter, “I feel like the guy who inherited the brewery the day after Prohibition went into effect.”

I mean, there was an order from the White House that officers in the US government above a certain level couldn't speak to Soviets without clearing it.

I was the senior person to go to the Soviet October Revolution party the following fall, and I had to get Cy Vance's personal approval. After I had become director of ACDA, I went over to Europe to touch base in a number of countries. And I was going to Bonn, and I said, “I'd like to go see Semenov, he's the Soviet ambassador to Bonn now.” That had to go to the Secretary of State as to whether I could go have a cup of tea with my old negotiating partner. Cy approved it, but it was that strained.

And then, of course, we had the Sverdlovsk incident, the alleged release of biological weapons in Sverdlovsk where anthrax allegedly killed a lot of Soviets. And we claimed that they were developing biological agents, they'd had an accident. They declared that it was a natural outbreak. And we hammered them on that.

Dobrynin was furious because Ed Muskie told him he had to come see me to discuss it. And he didn't want to go see the director of ACDA. He didn't deal with directors of ACDA, he dealt with Secretaries of State only. And Muskie in effect said, well, then you're never going to see me again unless you go talk to Ralph. Dobrynin came to see me and was very unhappy about the whole thing.And to this day we really don't know what happened in Sverdlovsk. I think, under the treaty, the biological warfare convention, you're permitted to maintain “certain amounts” for development of defenses. And I think that they had an explosion in their laboratory, and their “certain amount” got out the chimney and killed some people. But who knows. I don't think they were in violation of the treaty. Maybe their “certain amounts” were too big.

Q: When the Reagan administration came in, was there any contact, or did you just hand over the keys and go?

EARLE: Pretty much the latter. We offered, as I thought we should have, to do whatever we could. Their transition team came in, and fortunately I can't remember the names of any of them, because they were real hardhats. In fact, they were all fired by the Reagan administration because they were too far to the right.

Q: Well, this usually happens, doesn't it? I mean, there's a team that comes in, and then in very quick order in every administration you try to get rid of these. These are the people who get you elected, but you just don't want them around any more.

EARLE: Right, that's pretty much the case with this group. Larry Korb was a member, and he was really embarrassed. I don't know if you know Larry, but he became an assistant

secretary of defense and worked for Weinberger for five years and now is probably the greatest critic of the Weinberger regime. Larry is a Republican, but he's a good guy and a friend of mine. He said, “God, that group I was put with was really something.” Actually, Larry told me he wanted to be the director of ACDA, and I think he would have done an excellent job. They put Gene Rostow in. I'm very fond of Gene. He annoyed a lot of people, though. I don't know if you know him, but he will advise you on any subject. And apparently he would go to meetings at the White House and tell them how to solve the Middle East crisis. It was not a great policy difference that caused them to fire him, I think that he was just telling them things that they didn't want to hear from him. And then we got Ken Adelman.

Q: Well, we could go on, but this might be a good place to cut it. I want to thank you very much.

End of interview